

DE-GENDERING OF GENDERLECT: A CASE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

Relationships and tensions between gender and language have intrigued scholars for the past decades. Early scholars labelled woman's language as 'deficit' using man's language and communication style as a benchmark which triggered criticism from some scholars. Scholars were of the opinion that the inferiority of a woman's linguistic style was a reflection of the role she played in society. The idea that there is a difference between men and women gives the possibility of a theory based on gendered communication styles. Since the last two to three decades, more and more women have been entering the workforce and there has been a growing discussion on gender and language. Minimizing communication gap between male and female in the organization plays a significant role for the organizational success as the workplace might be impacted by the two styles of communication. Unless the communication gap is minimized, the world will look divided and so is the workplace. This paper aims to study the existence of two types of genderlects and difference of the communication style of male and female employees in today's workplace with the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the genderlects and the intermingling of the two styles of communication in the organization. It aims to study the differences and similarities between female and male genderlect in the workplace, and to explore de-gendering of the communication style in genderlects.

KEYWORDS: Communication, Genderlect, Language, Style & Workplace

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INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced business environment, employees find themselves being asked to perform more tasks, meet more deadlines, take on more responsibilities, and adapt to more change. Added to these challenges is the constantly shifting diversity of the workplace, where one has to cope with gender, age and cultural differences. According to Eisenberg (2006), people in organizations confront multiple situational requirements which require them to develop multiple and often conflicting goals, and respond with communicative strategies. Communication is at the foundation of everything we do and say, and is especially important in the 21st century workplace. An organization that is unable to effectively and efficiently communicate with its employees or customers, whether they operate in a masculine or feminine style of communication, will not be as successful as those organizations that do. As techniques for planning, strategizing, decision-making, problem solving, negotiating, building relations, branding become the common province of everyone in the organization, the need for shifting communication style is of paramount importance. In reality, the aim is to achieve competing goals each time we communicate in the workplace. A 21st century communicator is one who aims to achieve task goal, relational goal and an identity management goal. Task goal is the ability to get a job done. A relational goal is to maintain healthy relations by messages. An identity management goal is to make one's communication project the desired image.

The idea that there is a difference between men and women gives the possibility of a theory based on gendered communication styles. Gender communication is viewed as “communication about and between men and women (Ivy and Backlund, 2000). Within this definition, the term refers to how men and women are discussed and depicted. The theory of gender communication outlines key differences in two communication styles labelled masculine and feminine. Deborah Tannen, refers to these styles as genderlect. Genderlects is defined as a speech that contains features that mask it as stereotypically masculine or feminine. Genderlects is also viewed as two distinct cultural dialects (Griffin, 2006). The study of genderlect revealed the role of culture in producing gendered language associated with a particular gender. Organizational symbolism suggests that culture is “indirectly revealed through language, stories, nonverbal messages, and communicative exchanges” (Eisenberg, 2004), not something that is brought in from an existing outside culture or imposed by management. Tannen explained that men and women are said to be talking of “different words from different world”

(Griffin, 2012). This essentially means that men and women “just don’t understand” each other (McHugh & Hambaugh, 2010). Julia T. Wood's studies explain that "communication produces and reproduces cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity". Masculine and feminine cultures differ dramatically in when, how, and why they use communication. The goal of genderlect theory is to acknowledge and appreciate the language of the opposite sex and achieve mutual respect and understanding.

Research has shown that masculine communication traits have extrinsic goals like rewards, benefits, or power status whereas, feminine communication focuses on intrinsic goals like opportunities to grow and develop networks with others based on society’s view of stereotypes (Tomlinson, 1997). Tannen says in *Power Talk*, “It’s common to observe women who participate actively in one-on-one discussions or in all-female groups but who are seldom heard in meetings with a large proportion of men”. She further adds with regard to communicating in organization and the role of a manager, “Talk is the lifeblood of managerial work, and understanding that different people have different ways of saying what they mean will make it possible to take advantage of the talents of people with a broad range of linguistic styles”(1995).

RELEVANCE

There are important reasons why de-gendering of genderlect is relevant in higher education organisations. Higher education organisations find themselves at crossroads; they are centres through which global, national and local actors pass in to discover their goals. And universities are often large strategic actors with the opportunities to build linkages between these different actors. The genderlect analysis has the potential and possibility of direct application to 21st century organizations. In the higher education sector, teachers play various administrative roles and therefore their interaction is not limited to the classroom. They communicate with the opposite gender to perform various activities. Moreover, the ratio of female to male teachers has always been higher than in any other sector. The question is whether teachers communicate differently when they assume leadership or administrative roles. Research says that the male teacher’s communication and leadership styles are highly valued in many organizations but, educational environments “led by females tend to have a teaching and learning focus, are less concerned with standardised achievement and tend to be close-knit communities where individuals feel valued and cared for” (Shakeshaft in Shantz, 1993). Staffs who have a female administrator have higher job satisfaction and are more engaged in their work than those of a male administrator (Shakeshaft in Dom, O’Rourke & Paplewis, 2002). Further, “Female administrators have a greater preference for activities related to instructional leadership and communication, give recognition to the context of a situation while avoiding authoritarian solutions, and use a problem solving approach that incorporates flexibility and creativity. (Marshall & Mitchel in Shantz,

1993; Rosener in Dorn, O'Rourke & Papalewis, 2002). This study attempts to study the genderlect of male and female teachers who are engaged in various leadership and administrative roles, besides their primary role of teaching. Researchers have studied on the attributes that male and female teachers bring to the area of administration. Their findings confirm that women can be, and are, just as capable as men as administrators of schools. Morison and Zeimba (1997) state that women are "more inclusive, more consensual, more empathetic, [and] more concerned with process than men" (2). Women tend to be direct, practical, able to deal with detail, sensitive to personality clashes, intuitive about possible problems, and work hard at maintaining relationships within the school (Porat in Shantz, 1993). In education, the gender of students/teachers represents a factor that may bring diversity and discrimination into classrooms. Gender communication styles in educational institutions may demotivate students, teachers and other employees, and as a result interfere with academic/job performance. Information that is misinterpreted can cause problems that would otherwise would not have existed (Boone and Kurtz, 1984). Therefore, it is important to explore communication differences in educational institutions.

OBJECTIVE

- To study the genderlects in male and female teacher- administrators
- To explore the existence of genderlect theory associated with a particular gender in their communication styles and approaches

HYPOTHESIS

This paper aims to study the existence of two types of genderlects and difference of communication style of male and female employees in today's workplace with the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the genderlects and the intermingling of the two styles of communication in the organization.

METHODOLOGY

For this quantitative and qualitative study, sixty employees from various Universities across Odisha were taken through random sampling. They are engaged in teaching higher level college students. Figure 1 shows that out of total number of respondents, 66% were male and 34% female. Their age varies from 26 to 50 years.

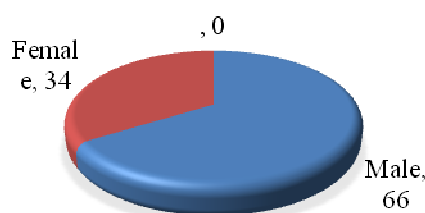


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

The data collection was done mainly through self-administered questionnaires consisting 20 items based on the long research studies conducted by known scholars. Scholars in the areas of gender and language include Deborah Tannen, Deborah Cameron, Janet Holmes, Robin Lakoff and others. Examples are 'Men and women differ in terms of asking questions in that..', 'in the workplace, a good way to open up a more functional dialogue is ...', and 'In Rapport talk, women talk to...'. The main purpose of these questions is to determine whether there are any significant differences or

similarities between male and female respondents when describing themselves/workplace communication. The analysis helped in reaching the conclusion so that the objectives of the study can be attained. The findings are drawn from the descriptive statistical analysis from the genderlect theory by renowned scholars of gender and language studies.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The study is done only in higher education sector in the context of Odisha and therefore, the findings might not be applicable to male and female employees working in several other sectors. The sample size is far too small to determine if these findings are significant. A larger, more diverse and segmented sample in this study would result in helpful corrections to the limitations of the study. Specifically, it would be helpful to have a much larger sample of teacher-administrators from other states of the country.

THE IDEA OF DE-GENDERING

Stereotypically, most women are considered to carry feminine communication traits and most men have masculine communication traits. Most communication theorists date this ‘genderlect’ theory to a 1974 article by Cheris Kramen who studies the existence of sex-linked system of language use. Early works in genderlect theory explored how gender patterns in language use often diminish, weakens, marginalized or even silence woman’s position compared to men’s. The aim of this paper is to attempt a de-gendering of communication style in order to bring the best of genderlects, rather than favouring one of them to the detriment of the other. As we focus on linking and connection, rather than ranking and difference, we might begin to use language that disassociates human behaviour from gender altogether and simply describe the behaviour itself. De-gendering our language, de-gendering our communication style is more descriptive of the behaviour itself without being prescriptive of gender (Eisler & Loye, 1990). Wood (2011) explains that men and women grow in different gender speech communities and, thus, develop different communication styles. As far as communication abilities are concerned, the most important aspect revealed in the present study is that the most appropriate and appreciated feminine or masculine style is also used by the other gender in an efficient way. Thus, there is no best communication style for all business interactions, and certainly there are many exceptions to these generalities. The paper uses different terms, such as “women’s language” (Lakoff, 1973), “the female register” (Grosby and Nyquist, 1977), “genderlect” (Kramer, 1974) and “gender-related-language” (Mulac et al, 1986) while discussing de-gendering of communication style in workplace.

Verbal conduct is very important at workplace. Men and women face normative expectations about the appropriate mode of speech for their gender (Deborah Cameron). This acceptance of a “proper” speech style, Cameron describes (in her 1995 book of the same name) as “verbal hygiene”. Sexual stereotyping of roles can be eliminated by:

- Using the same term (which avoids the generic man) for both females and males (e.g., department chair or chairperson), or by using the corresponding verb (such as to chair)
- Not calling attention to irrelevancies (for example, that women, male nurse)

The characteristics of male and female use of language has been researched from a different perspective that the two genders operate like two cultures that are made easily visible through two different conversational styles (Tannen, 1985). As we understand Deborah Tannen views communication between men and women as cross cultural, and follows the rules inherent in learning another language. That language is Genderlect. Some researchers also argued that social

differences between men and women's roles are not the clear reflection of their language use subsequently leading to 'de-gendering' of the linguistic style and speech practices. Feminists advocated to adopt female 'genderlect' to be not only the effective but alternative to male 'genderlect'.

DISSIMILARITIES AND SIMILARITIES IN COMMUNICATION STYLES

Verbal-Non-Verbal

Relationships and tensions between gender and language have intrigued scholars for the past decades. Early scholars labelled woman's language as 'deficit' using man's language and communication style as a benchmark which triggered criticism from some scholars. Scholars Cameron (2003) put forward that women are better at listening and sharing emotions with others. Therefore, it is common to find references of feminine communication as how women communicate and masculine communication as how men communicate. Communication researchers have used gender role theory to express the communication behaviour of females and males and the evaluation of communication behavior when males and females perform it. Some researchers like Martell and associates argued that even small differences such as a negative bias of only 1%-5% towards women could lead to lack of success or even promotion in an organization. The study also mirrored the kind and size of gender discrimination that has been reported at the workplace. Dating back to 1975, "women's register" served to maintain women's subordinate role in society (Robin). These include tag questions, question intonation and weak directives. Early researcher like Lakoff (1975) says that women's speech is "deficient, as conveying weakness, uncertainty, and unimportance, in contrast to the standard or neutral language spoken by men".

Males use a more assertive style while females use a tentative one. The assertive style has been said to be masculine and the tentative style feminine. Males communicate with greater volume, lower pitch, and greater inflection, which give power and passion to their ideas (Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Payne, 2001). Females, on the other hand, do not speak as loudly, have higher pitched voices, and are hesitant, which communicates weakness rather than strength. They often sound powerless due to frequent use of hedges, qualifiers, and tag questions (Mulac, Lundell, & Bradac, 1986). Women are said to use more disclaimers, fillers and qualifiers (Lemmer, 1996). Some examples provided by Lemmer (1996, p.58) are: disclaimer statements like "I think", "I guess...", "I wonder"; qualifiers such as "awfully nice", "terribly nervous", or "really super"; and fillers such as words or phrases like "ums", "you know", "er", or "like".

The term 'genderlect' extends over speech to non-verbal communication. Women's "ability to read non-verbal cues is one of the greatest strengths (they bring) it the business setting". If there is one area of communication in which women excel, it is nonverbal communication. Not only are women more responsive to nonverbal stimuli, but they also interpret these nonverbal cues with greater accuracy. Women display more "warm" body language cues to focus on those who are speaking by orienting head and torso to face participants. This expertise gives women access to information men might not have and provides clues for inspiring workers to follow this leadership. They lean forward, smile, synchronize their movements with others, nod and tilt their heads (the universal signal of listening). Women seem to be unsure of themselves compared to men when they qualify their statements with words such as "maybe" or "perhaps," or verbs such as "could," "might," and "may."

Rapport Talk-Report Talk

Rapport talk at workplace refers to a communication style meant to promote social affiliation and emotional connection. It refers to the types of communication inclusive of skills of talking, nurturing, emotional expression, empathy,

and support. For most women the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships (Tannen, 1994). Deborah Tannen argues that men tend to use 'report style' aiming to communicate factual and content based information whereas women often use a 'rapport style' which is more concerned with building and maintaining relationship. The typical conversational style of women, which seeks to establish connection with others is labelled by Wood as "the essence of relationships" and the use of language as a means to "foster connections, support, closeness, and understanding". Women are typically described as more expressive, more relationship oriented, and more concerned with creating and maintaining intimacy; whereas men are described as more instrumental, more task oriented, and more concerned with gathering information, or with establishing and maintaining social status or power (Bernard, 1972; Indvik & Fitzpatrick, 1982; Parsons & Bales, 1955). Gilligan (1982) asserted that women measure everything in terms of relationships and men measure in terms of logic. For men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order; a language of report. The typical monologic style of men, which seeks to command attention, convey information, and win arguments. Gray (1992) view on women's (he calls them "Venusians") sense of self in the work place is defined primarily by the quality of her work relationships. In the workplace, Venusians respect efficiency and achievement, but value support, trust, and communication more. He also claimed that Venusians are more interested in the quality of work relationships, personal expression, and mutual support than Martians. Venusians experience fulfilment by sharing, collaborating, and cooperating in the process of achieving greater success. Some researchers also argued that social differences between men and women's roles are not the clear reflection of their language use subsequently leading to 'de-gendering' of the linguistic style and speech practices. Feminists advocated to adopt female 'genderlect' to be not only the effective but alternative to male 'genderlect'.

Interruptions-Cooperative Overlaps

Women and men communicate differently is in the use of interruptions, one of the most highly researched areas in gender communication.

A joke has it that a woman sues her husband for divorce. When the judge asks her why she wants a divorce, she explains that her husband has not spoken to her in two years. The judge then asks the husband, "why haven't you spoken to your wife in two years", He replies, "I didn't want to interrupt her" (Tannen).

Ground breaking studies in the 1970s and 1980s, in contrast, say that men interrupt women far more than women interrupt men. Research shows that males use verbal interruption as a mechanism of power and dominance in conversations (Aries, 1996). Men interrupting women interactions were observed in some studies to be as high as 96 to 100 percent. West and Zimmerman (1975, 1983) analyzed cross-sex conversations and interruptions, finding that out of 48 interruptions, 46 were perpetrated by men. Research further reveals that women tend to use interruptions to indicate interest and to facilitate the conversation, while men tend to use interruptions to control the conversation. Men assert their dominance in several ways: by interrupting others to change the topic or to disagree with the speaker and by talking more than women. Some scholars differentiate affiliative interruption, or interruption that is intended to support, and disaffiliative interruption, interruption intended to disempower or make an individual appear weak (Goldberg, 1990; Makri-Tsilipakou, 1994). For example, women may overlap someone else's speech in an attempt to agree with or add to an idea of the speaker. Women, when talking to each other, use cooperative overlap to a significantly greater extent than men.

One of the most striking aspects of high involvement style that I found and analysed in detail was the use of what I called "cooperative overlap": a listener talking along with a speaker not in order to interrupt but to show enthusiastic

listenership and participation. (Tannen 1996: 53).

Cooperative overlap, introduced by Deborah Tannen in her book *Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends* (1984) is considered as high involvement style and a supportive interruption often meant to show agreement and solidarity with the speaker. These interruptions are not misfires or errors but interpreted as attempts to overwhelm the other speaker (Lein and Brenneis).

Competitive - Collaborative

Women have a more cooperative orientation than men and that men are more competitive than women (Rubin & Brown, 1975). Men's communication in teams tends to be more competitive and is used to express dominance (Briton & Hall, 1995; LaFrance & Henley, 1994). Men are competitive speakers who are more likely to engage in conflict by arguing and issuing commands, while women are cooperative and likely to avoid conflict by agreeing and making suggestions rather than commands (Tannen, 1993). When cooperative or collaborative style is used in conversation the floor is a shared space for connection and intimacy.

Asking Questions

Asking Questions means different things to men and women. Males often question in an interrogating manner while females may question to clarify their understanding of something. Additionally, women may add a question at the end of their talk to seek support. Questions such as, "Don't you agree?" or "What do you think?" may make women appear weak and lacking in confidence. Men ask questions to gather information while women ask questions to both gather information and show interest in what the other person has said to cultivate the relationship. Women are culturally conditioned to maintain harmony in relationships. This conditioning is often manifested in a demand, "If you don't mind, can you work on this subject?" Women demand is normally followed by a suggestion, e.g. "This may be a crazy idea, but you may try it". Women ask a question and actually listen to the answer, which is something men do not love to do.

Tag Question

Women indicate their lack of confidence by the use of tag questions and rising intonations on declarative statements to seek confirmation from the listener (Lakoff). A short question at the end of a declarative statement, often used by women to soften the sting of potential disagreement or invite open, friendly dialogue. They often use tagged phrases like "don't you think" following the presentation of an idea, "if you don't mind" following a demand or "this may be a silly idea, but" preceding a suggestion. In a research carried out by Cameron et al. (1998), it was found that men used more facilitative and modal tags than women did. Facilitative tags are addressee-oriented, expressing the speaker's solidarity or positive attitude to the addressee. On the contrary, modal tags are speaker-oriented and signal speaker's desire for confirmation (Holmes).

Further, a study on gender communication differences has revealed 105 communication characteristics involving speech, voice, facial expressions, and body language that distinguish men and women (Lillian Glass):

- Men interrupt more than women in business
- Men are more direct, women are more indirect
- Men take more declarative statements, women make more tentative statements

- Men are goal-oriented, women are more process oriented
- Men show their frustration by shouting, women by crying.

Harris (1984) argues that employee's use of tag questions does not express uncertainty or a request for confirmation as was commonly assumed, but that it actually reflects a very powerful act in that questions demand answers. From this point of view, women are not tentative and insecure but authoritative and powerful.

Directness - Indirect

Masculine communication is direct, succinct, and instrumental, while feminine communication is indirect, elaborate, and affective (Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001). Masculine style is more direct, assertive, and tough. It has been found that men are more dominant in speech, with more verbal attacks and acts of interruption (as cited in Ahagen & Nilsson, 2013). Women often suggest that people do things in indirect ways - "let's", "why don't we?" or "wouldn't it be good, if we...?" Several studies have shown that women tend to soften their demands and statements, whereas men tend to be more direct (Coates, 1989; Tannen, 1990; Spender, 1980; Case, 1994). Women are often indirect in their communication. A case in point is "I am wondering if I could leave the keys with you?" Other examples of indirect communication include the use of polite expressions; hedges, which are adverbs or adverb phrases, such as sort of, kind of, and may be, that temper the strength of an argument.

FINDING

This paper is not set out to argue female communication or male communication is more effective in the workplace, but remove overgeneralisation of gender-split in terms of communication. As per the findings 76% feel that women's communication is not 'deficit' in content but depends on the past experience/culture. Around 70% reported that women speak with confidence. It is important to note that statements made in Table 1 regarding the context of male or female talk is reversed in the current study, with the men being the 'rapport talker' and the women 'report' talker. Both in 'Rapport talk' and "Report Talk" women and men talk to convey information. As per 60% of respondents, men's behaviour related to storytelling shows that men tell stories that often place them in the role of a hero. And 90% say that women's story telling behaviour reveals a great deal about their hopes, needs, and values. 80% of the participants view that the basis for overall male communication is to build relationships. 60% of respondents say that the overall objective for women's communication is to create understanding.

Table 1: Summary of Statements where Significant Differences Between Male and Female Genderlects were Found

Overgeneralisation of gender-split in terms of communication.	Research Findings
Woman's language is 'deficit'.	76% feel that women's language is not 'deficit' in content but depends on the past experience/culture.
Women lack confidence.	70% reported that women speak with confidence
Men prefer 'report style'.	80% of the respondents view that the basis for overall male communication is to build relationships
Women often use a 'rapport style'.	60% of respondents say that the overall objective for women's communication is to create understanding.
Men tell more stories.	Women also tell stories. 90% say it stories reveal a great deal about their hopes, needs, and values.
Men never listen.	70% respondents say that both men and women attach almost equal weightage to listening

Table 1: Contd.,	
Men and women communicate differently in the use of tag questions	72% feel that there is no significant difference between male and female communication with regard to the use of tag questions.
Women interrupt to show enthusiastic leadership & participation	60% say that women interrupt in conversation to get attention
Women are more empathetic	65% reported that both males and females showed same degree of verbal consideration and empathy.

The current study revealed no significant difference between male and male communication with regard to the use of tag questions. Figure 2 reflects that men and women attach almost equal weightage to listening.

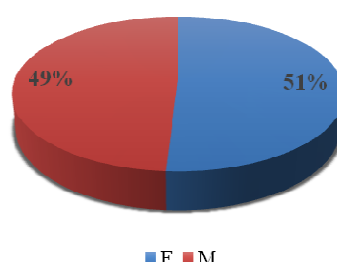


Figure 2: Listening Weightage

In the study men and women don't differ in terms of asking questions. Around 50% of the respondents reported that men don't ask questions it's because such admissions of ignorance diminishes their sense of self-sufficiency and status, women don't ask questions it's because it eats away at their sense of self-sufficiency and status. When women ask, it means to establish connection or to show participation. When men ask, it means to take control of the conversation/ switch the conversation. More than half of the population said that for women in the workplace, a good way to open up a more functional dialogue is "I wish we could..." and for men "We need to talk." Findings reveal that both genders use the same language. Males and females showed same degree of verbal consideration and empathy. Then, definitely the question of where then does the difference between the two genders arises. This question of gender differences and whether those found in communication styles are significant enough to be deemed valid is a long-standing point of contention among gender theorists. Most of the respondents have direct communication styles. Studies involving directness in communication have revealed no gender differences in directness. For example, they are equally direct in salary negotiation, agreement, disagreement and refusal. According to some respondents women interrupt in conversation to get attention. Researchers have not tried to find out why the interruption takes place and what is the speaker's aim or communication goal. Is it reinforcement, a contradiction or a change in topic? Sometimes interruptions are not real interruptions, they are cooperative overlaps. Women avoid conflict and so do the male employees. 70% respondents consider women are more social and emotional in their interaction. The study doesn't reveal whether men or women are better in resolving crisis and mutual conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, findings show that the dominance of particular communication style and genderlect associated with particular gender is no more as profound as it was earlier except a few. There is no significant difference in the communication of asserting ideas, opinions and identity. Female employees are communicating as clearly and assertively as male employees. In contrary to Tannen's theory, the study found that both female and male use communication to create

and maintain relationships which was considered to a female forte earlier. To conclude, the main purpose of this study is not to determine which communicative style is best or to motivate others to change completely, but to identify the similarities and dissimilarities for the purpose of understanding and adaptation.

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